

TEN GUIDES TO PROPER MEDICINE USE

1 When medicine is being prescribed for the first time:

- **Inform your physician or pharmacist about any other medicines (prescription and nonprescription) you are taking currently.** Sometimes, when medicines are taken together, they may interact and produce potentially harmful side effects.
- **Tell your physician or pharmacist about any allergies or personal medical conditions you might have, such as pregnancy, high blood pressure, glaucoma or diabetes.** Certain personal conditions may mean you should not take some medicines.
- **Tell your physician or pharmacist about any dietary supplements you are taking.**
- **Be sure you understand all instructions before leaving the doctor's office or pharmacy.** For example, does "four times a day" mean "take one every six hours around the clock," or "take four times during your waking hours only?" Should the medicine be taken before, with or after meals? Are there any foods, drinks or activities (such as driving) which should be avoided while taking the medicine?
- **Write down all instructions for future reference.**

2 When buying or taking any medicine, you should always follow these tips to protect yourself against tampering:

- **Read the label.** Tamper-evident packaging identifies the seals and other protective features to note.
- **Inspect the outer packaging for signs of tampering.**
- **Examine the medicine itself before taking it.** Check for capsules or tablets that differ from the others that are enclosed. Do not use medicine from packages that have cuts, tears or other imperfections.
- **Never take medicine in the dark.**
- **Read the label and examine the medicine at every dose.**
- **If in doubt, tell somebody.** Do not buy or use medicine that looks suspicious. Always inform the store manager about questionable products so they can be removed.

Before buying any medicine, you should **STOP** and take a **LOOK**. Before taking it, you should **LOOK AGAIN**.

3 When buying or taking nonprescription medicine, read the label – including warnings.

Medicine labels will tell you:

- what the medicine is used for;
- how and when to take it, and, just as important, when not to take it;
- possible interactions or side effects;
- warnings;
- if and when to consult a doctor; and
- the medicine's active and inactive ingredients.

4 When taking prescription medicines:

- **Take medicines for the entire period they are prescribed.** Symptoms sometimes disappear before the condition has totally cleared up. If you stop taking the medicine too soon, your recovery may take longer, so be certain to follow your doctor's directions.
- **Do not take more medicine than prescribed.** Taking twice as much never means that you will get better twice as fast. Too high a dose may make the medicine ineffective. It might even be dangerous.
- **Take medicines at the proper time.** In some cases, medicines should be taken before, during or after meals. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.
- **Never take any medicine that has been prescribed for a friend or relative.** Only a physician is qualified to determine if a prescription medicine should be used by you at any given time. The same medicine may work differently for different people.

5 When taking all medicines:

- **Do not consume alcoholic beverages with medicines until you check with your doctor or pharmacist.** Mixing alcohol with some medicines may cause drowsiness, hamper the medicine's effectiveness or create a potentially dangerous situation.
- **Check for an expiration date on your medicine label to make sure that the medicine is still effective.**
- **Be sure to store all medicines as instructed on the label, and safely dispose of all out-of-date medicines where children and pets cannot reach them.**
- **Keep all medicines in their original containers.** This will eliminate the risk of confusing one medicine with another, not having the proper instructions on hand or taking out-dated medicines.
- **Always replace child-resistant caps carefully.**
- **Remember that the handicapped, the elderly and families without children can purchase prescription medicines without a child-resistant cap by asking their pharmacist.** Nonprescription medicines are available in non-child-resistant packaging specifically labeled for households without young children.

6 When medicines don't work...

Sometimes you may find that a medicine does not appear to be working correctly. Your symptoms may continue or you may experience unexpected side effects. These problems may be due to:

- Not following the correct dosage schedule, such as stopping too soon, taking too much or taking it at the wrong time;
- Interaction with certain foods or beverages;
- Interaction with other medicines you are taking;
- Trying to treat yourself with a nonprescription remedy when your problem requires professional medical attention; or
- Complications which demand further medical attention.

If symptoms continue, or if there are any new symptoms or unusual side effects, talk to your physician or pharmacist.

7 If you are pregnant or nursing a baby, consult your physician or pharmacist before taking any medicine.

If you have children,

the following tips will help ensure that they receive the right medicine and the right amount:

- **Always read the label to determine the proper dose.** Never guess the amount of medicine to give.
- **Do not play doctor.** Twice the recommended dose is not appropriate, even if your child seems twice as sick as the last time.
- **Follow the age-limit recommendations.** If the label indicates that the medication should not be given to children under the age of two, consult your doctor.
- **Avoid making conversions.** If the label says two teaspoons and you're using a dosing cup with ounces only, get another measuring device.
- **Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before giving two medicines at the same time.**

8

If you are elderly, and a medicine is being prescribed,

tell your doctor exactly what medicines – both prescription and nonprescription – and dietary supplements you are taking. As you get older, changes in your body may make you more susceptible to drug interactions that could lead to unwanted side effects. There also is the possibility that certain medicines, taken together, could increase or decrease their effectiveness.

9

Ask your pharmacist about patient records.

Many pharmacists now keep patient records for you so that you'll be able to keep track of all medicines you are currently taking, as well as allergies and current medical conditions. This service is particularly valuable if you are being prescribed medicines by more than one doctor.

10

Keep a record of the medicines you are taking.

If you are taking several different medicines or if you are particularly ill, keeping a record of medications as you take them can help you use medicines properly and safely.

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THE MEDICINE LABEL:

It's the first step to getting better.

“Staying healthy” can mean taking that long overdue vacation. Or, getting proper exercise and eating a balanced diet. And, it often means taking medicines.

Responsible self-care can be personally satisfying, as well as an economical and excellent way to stay healthy.

The following 10 guides describe what you should keep in mind when taking medicines, whether prescription or nonprescription. Information about medicines can also be obtained from your doctor, your pharmacist and the medicine label.